

# DOT ALDRICH HAS AN ATTACK OF CONSCIENCE

BY FANNIE KILBOURNE

Sprightly Tale of Husbands and Wives and Money They Spend

WILL and I have been married four months, and yet practically everybody still calls me Dot Aldrich.

When we got back to Montrose, after our honeymoon in Chicago, I was so busy for the first three weeks that I didn't notice the utter lack of respect I was getting. We took the stucco bungalow right next to Dulcie and Roger Lane, and what with buying furniture and moving over chairs and things that Will's mother or mine could let us use for a while, we hardly had time to think.

The first time that I noticed it was when I was going to have mother and father for dinner. I called up Mr. Libby in the morning and told him to send me a nice car, by 2 o'clock. I called him at 4 o'clock, because it hadn't come.

"I sent it, Miss Horton, just as you said, at 2 o'clock," he said, "and there wasn't nobody home."

"Why, I've been right here ever since—" I began, and then the truth dawned on me. He had sent it to Will's mother.

"This is Mr. W. E. Horton," I said icily. "Did you make a mistake?"

"Mrs. W. E. Horton?" he repeated. "Mrs. Horton, for the love of Pete! You're Dot Aldrich! Why didn't you say so?"

Any one would have thought that I was using an assumed name!

Although I was irritated a little, I didn't lay it up against Mr. Libby really, because you've got to expect old people to be a little slow about catching on to things. However, everybody else was just as bad. Mother kept right on telling me to wear my spats on damp days.

"Mother," I finally said gently, "you know I'm a married woman, now."

Father laughed. "And has the weather," he asked, "no effect on a married constitution?"

I was talking to Mrs. Dunwoody one day about Mrs. Henning's divorce, and I said how strange it was that some couples couldn't get along. "Of course," Mr. Horton is quite easy to get along with in the main, but there are times when he has business worries on his mind and—"

I paused, for Mrs. Dunwoody's chin began to shake as though she were going to cry. Then she lost control altogether. But she wasn't crying, she was laughing.

"Oh, excuse me, Dot," she said at last, "but I just couldn't help it—it was your calling him Mr. Horton—and having business worries on his mind—"

"I don't see what's the matter," I said stiffly. "You call your husband Mr. Dunwoody."

"I know it," she said. "I apologize. But I—"

She still wasn't breathing. I got to thinking about one Easter when Will came trailing into my room at midnight, and I just can't help it." And she was off again.

SO I realize that it would do me not the slightest good in the world to pass on a discovery I have made. My discovery has to do with money.

matters. I have heard countless people say that the money question is probably the one greatest cause of married quarrels. Mother says so. When I first got back from Chicago, she said that I'd better have a good straightforward talk with Will, and get him to give me an allowance to run the house on. I did so, but Will did not care for the idea at all.

"I don't want to dole out money as if it belonged to me and that it was a favor to you to buy a couple of lamb chops with it," he said manfully. "You know what salary Dad is paying me, and that after we pay for the new rug and the dining room suite, I'll have around two hundred dollars in the bank. Everything I've got belongs to you just as much as me."

"Yes," I said rather faintly. Uncle Horace had sent me \$25 for a wedding present, and I had sort of figured that it would belong just to me. However, I could see that it wouldn't be fair to have everything that belonged to Will ours and everything that belonged to me mine.

Then he suggested that, instead of the allowance idea, we should have a budget, and both keep accounts. Father said that was a fine idea and he gave us a book on "How to Stretch the Dollar," a big account book and the cutest little "budget box," all little squares like the drawer of a cash register. As soon as I saw it I knew that having a budget would be fun.

So every Saturday night we divided up Will's salary. The proposition was that we should put in the bank Monday morning. The rest we divided up in the little squares, so much for meat, so much for groceries, so much for dentist and doctor. That little box took care of everything.

There was even one square for wear and tear on the house and furniture. It was a perfect circus to work it.

There was one square in the budget box marked "Luxuries." This was beside the one for "Hospitality and Amusement," from which we bought tickets to the movies, an extra bottle of cream when we had company for dinner, and so on.

"Suppose we put a dollar a week in for luxuries," Will suggested. "If we don't spend it, all right; but we need a little leeway. There isn't any other square, for instance, where I could get the money for the basket ball pool."

"Oh, Will!" I said reproachfully. There is a basket ball club in the five towns around here, and they play once a week. A lot of the young fellows in town have got up a pool—everybody puts in a half dollar apiece, then draws lots to see which team he's betting on, and the winner gets the money. That sort of thing is all right for bachelors, of course, but it's not for married men.

"It isn't the money, Will," I said. "It's the principle of the thing. You're so unlucky. It isn't as if you might win once in a while." Will said, well, he supposed he ought to cut out all that sort of thing now that he was a married man.

THE first week we bought a dish drainer with the luxury tax, as Will called that part of the budget. It was a special kind so that you could wash the dishes, wipe the dishes, and it was certainly a luxury when you think of it that way. The next week Will bought a pencil-sharpening machine. He said he had hankered for one of them all his life. That struck me as about the funniest thing I'd ever heard of, but I didn't say a word. And the next week I spent the whole dollar on sashet. I felt it was really for both of us—Will would smell it just the same as I would, and I was perfectly willing to put some little bags of it in his bureau drawer, too, but he didn't care to have me.

It never occurred to me the terrible worry that that budget box would cost me. If I had been getting the respect that a young married woman is entitled to, right along, I might not have been so weak when Mr. Wellington Napp came into my life.

I opened the door one snowy morning to find him standing on the steps. "Good morning," he said, with a very attractive smile. "Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mrs. Horton, Mrs. William Elbridge Horton?"

"Yes," I said, wishing I had taken off my apron, although it was orchid blue, an unusual color for aprons and very becoming.

"Mr. Napp is kind enough to suggest my coming to see you," he went on. Mr. Napp is the high school principal, and for a second I had the queer, guilty feeling a principal's name always gives you, long after you are out of his clutches.

"Won't you come in?" I asked, it being very cold.

"Thank you," he said, smiling again. "I feel very guilty taking up a moment of your busy matron's time."

"Oh, I'm not so very busy this morning," I said. You could tell at a glance that he was a very nice young man.

He sat down in our one overstuffed chair, that we call our "spooner chair," because it's strong enough to hold us both. He told me that he was Mr. Wellington Napp.

"I'm calling on just a few of the younger matrons in Montrose," he said. "You young married women must be awfully concocted." He went on, with his nice smile, "when you know how all of us who are interested in the intellectual side of the nation's towns have to come to you most of all to get you to exercise your influence on our behalf."

"I'm afraid," I said, feeling that I must be honest with him, "that is, I'm not sure that I could be said to have a great deal of influence—"

"I knew you were going to say that," he interrupted me. "It's the charming, intellectual woman, Mrs. Horton, who always tells me that she hasn't any influence. You'll be telling me next, Mrs. Horton, that you don't like poetry."

"Oh, no," I said. "I'm very fond of poetry."

"There!" he said, triumphantly. "I knew the instant I saw you that I had made no mistake in coming to you among the very first here in Montrose. We have a perfectly marvelous opportunity, Mrs. Horton, to offer to just a few of the matrons of Montrose. Now this, Mrs. Horton, is the opportunity I am offering to you in preference to some of the older women of the town. I guess I'm something of a sentimentalist, Mrs. Horton: I can't bear to see poetry go into a home where it isn't going to be loved."

Wasn't that sweet of him!

"Out of all the poetry of the world, Mrs. Horton, we have chosen only the finest and the best—ten volumes of it. 'Epics, Sonnets and Lyrics of the Ages,' we call our choice. The books are bound in—"

he glanced around our living room—"isn't it fate that red books should be the one touch your color scheme needs?"

"But ten books!" I faltered.

"Wouldn't they be terribly expensive?" Mr. Napp smiled.

"Fifty cents a week," he said triumphantly. "Fifty cents a week for hyacinths to feed your soul, Mrs. Horton."

"Why, I could afford that, all right!" I exclaimed.

I signed where he told me to, on a dotted line, and gave him the first 50 cents. I went back to my cleaning silver with a sort of exalted feeling. Will might earn money for our physical necessities; it was my part to see that the esthetic side of life was not overlooked.

JUST before dinner time, I was out on the back porch a minute and I saw Dulcie on hers.

"Hello!" she said. "If you hear wild screams from our house you'll know that Roger is cutting my throat. I've got to break the news to him that I fell for another book agent this morning."

"A book agent," I echoed.

"Poetry," said Dulcie. "'Epics, Sonnets and Lyrics of the Ages.' He was a silver-tongued orator, and I guess I went into a trance. Roger will be a fit."

I went back to the kitchen, feeling strangely uneasy. Some way, it had never occurred to me that Mr. Napp was a book agent. I recalled that Will is not so very fond of poetry. For the first time it occurred to me that I had not asked how long I would have to pay 50 cents a week. I didn't say anything to Will about it during the first half of dinner, trying to make up my mind the best way to tell it. Suddenly an inspiration came to me. I needn't ever tell him at all. Half of that luxury money belonged to me. I would just pay 50 cents a week to feed my soul and not say a word to Will about it.

The last of the week the books came, and they were beautiful, but huge. Ten of them! They were a lovely, glowing mass, and Mr. Napp was a lovely, glowing man. I thought it would do for me to have them all.

Finally I took them up to the attic storeroom and put them under a quilt. It didn't seem right to keep the epics, sonnets and lyrics of the ages under a quilt, but I thought it would do for me to have them all.

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Then came a week when I couldn't possibly skip the 50 cents out of the housekeeping box. I went to the dentist-and-doctor square again, remembering how Will had said proudly that he'd be before he'd go to his father for help, now that he was a married man. I wondered if he really would, if he should be terribly sick and there was only enough doctor-and-dentist money to pay for one or two visits. I stood looking at that little square of bills and 50-cent pieces, my heart like lead. I could see Will getting sicker and sicker, and no money for the doctor, just because I was indulging myself with epics and lyrics.

And then, suddenly, an idea came to me. Maybe, if I should refuse to send the 50 cents, they would take the books back and drop everything. New hope in my heart, I rushed up to the attic to see if they were all right. I lifted up the quilt and looked at the books. My heart sank again, lower than ever. There must have been a mouse in the storeroom, because one corner of the lowest book looked as though it had been nibbled. I realized that now the firm would never take them back.

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"You are not," I said, hanging on tighter. "What did you spend the money on?"

"The basket ball pool," said Will grimly. "I hated to turn the fellows down; they think you're a tightwad if you can raise 50 cents a week, and kid you about being henpecked, and—"

Well, if I can't stand a little kidding for you—"

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Then I told him about the "Epics, Lyrics and Sonnets of the Ages."

"And I've been stealing all the time from you, Will," I said. "Taking fifty cents a week that I don't know how long I'll have to keep up—money that you might need when you are sick, and—"

I lifted my head off Will's chest, and, to my surprise, he began to grin. "Wh-what are you smiling at?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know," said Will. Then he began to laugh. "You lifting off my death-bed fund and me stealing from your old age—and—oh, goosh, it's funny!"

Then he laughed and laughed till a tear trickled down the side of his nose. I didn't see anything funny at all, but I began to laugh, too, because Will was laughing, and everything in the world seemed to be all right. We laughed and laughed. Then Will hugged me and kissed me again, and we laughed some more.

WE CALL IT OUR "SPOONER CHAIR," BECAUSE IT'S STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD US BOTH.

Finally we opened up the books and found the slip saying how long I'd have to pay fifty cents a week and how you got discount for cash. Will said they were a darn hard-some-looking set of books, and why didn't I take Uncle Horace's twenty-five dollars and pay them off.

"That would not be enough," I said, thinking of that money for the first time.

Will started to laugh again.

"I've got just enough," he said, "to make up the difference."

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

"I won it," said Will. "That's what gave me the nerve to 'fess up."

"You won it? You won the basket ball pool?"

"Yep," said Will.

STAYED up in the attic while the caves and talked a long time. We agreed to split the luxury money—fifty cents a week apiece. Neither had to tell the other one what he did with his fifty. We even went further than that—we made the absolute flat rule that neither one could tell or ask the other what he did with his share.

Now, that may sound very simple and trifling, but I honestly believe it is one of the secrets of a happy marriage. There's something too tight-fitting about owning every single penny together and having to spend it together, like machinery that's screwed up so tight it won't work. Having fifty cents a week that belongs just to you alone is just like the oil on the machinery—it seems to give a little slip and ease to the budget wheels.

I know that this one little secret would make thousands of married people happy. I'd like to tell them about it, explain how, although I am saving every penny of mine to buy Will a birthday present with June. Knowing that I don't have to make a fat rule that neither one could tell or ask the other what he did with his share.

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THE trouble began Monday, when I had to send the next 50 cents in a little cardboard holder that had come with the books. I opened the budget box, and there in the luxury square were two new half dollars, our week's luxury. It would be very simple and perfectly honest for me to slip one of them into the holder and send it, but, of course, later in the week, Will would be likely to want some luxury and would see that half of the money was gone.

I cast my eye over the other squares, and the idea occurred to me that I might borrow from one of them, refuse all luxuries of any form, and then—Will, of course, wouldn't spend the whole dollar himself, week after week—return the loan as soon as I had a good chance. This was a very simple way, and at once I took a half dollar out of the doctor and dentist square and sent it to the epics firm.

Everything would have worked out perfectly all right if it hadn't been for the one thing that causes me practically all my troubles; that is, my conscience. I do wish my conscience were either strong enough to keep me from doing questionable things in the first place or else weak enough to let me just forget all about them once I've done them.

That half dollar hadn't been in the pocket office an hour before I had warnings that I was going to have an attack of conscience.

"Dot Aldrich," I said to myself, "I do wish to heaven you weren't so good!"

I FELT that I was being terribly pie for dinner to sort of make it up to him, but the fact that I had taken the 50 cents out of the doctor and dentist box preyed on my mind. I felt that while I was feeding Will rich and indigestible food with one hand I was stealing his doctor money with the other. I wished I had made a simple cornstarch pudding and not trifled with his health.

To make it worse, all that week I couldn't take out 50 cents worth of the money out of wear-and-tear-on-house-and-furniture. That did not seem quite so mean, but as luck would have it, Will spilled salad on the rug and I had to have it cleaned, which took every penny out of that square.

I couldn't take out 50 cents again. The next week I took the 50 cents out of dentist-and-doctor again. There was no other square I could get it from.

And, to make it all the worse, Will was so sorry that he had done this to me, that he had been so busy that he couldn't tell me all the time. Every nice thing he did for me made me feel meaner and guiltier. He never even touched the luxury money. Finally, when there was \$4 in the box, he said to me, "Dolly, I've got something with this. Dottie. What'll you have?"

"Nothing," I said hollowly. "There isn't a thing I want."

"Oh, come off!" said Will coaxingly. "Try to think of something. I want to buy you something nice. Gee, Dot, I'm getting sicker on you every day."

And that was the man I was deliberately stealing from! The man whose doctor money I was embezzling to pay for epics and sonnets!

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I'd kept telling Will about how thrifty I was in marketing, in order to ease my conscience a little. Once or twice when I did this, he looked at me so queerly that I wondered if he suspected anything. And all the time the luxury money kept mounting higher and higher. Will never touched it, but he seemed to take a morbid pleasure in counting up just how much there was, so I never dared touch it, either.

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"I've meant to put it back out of the luxury money some time," Will went on. "But I knew you'd miss it."

"WHAT?" I said, and then I asked, "You mean you've been taking my money?"

"Money you thought I was putting in the bank," said Will. "I sneaked out half a dollar every week; I meant to put it back as soon as I could—and well today I got to thinking what a peach you were and how I was squandering money that should be left to take care of you in your old age. Well, I'm through, that's all. I'm a bum."

"You are not," I said, hanging on tighter. "What did you spend the money on?"

"The basket ball pool," said Will grimly. "I hated to turn the fellows down; they think you're a tightwad if you can raise 50 cents a week, and kid you about being henpecked, and—"

Well, if I can't stand a little kidding for you—"

"Oh, Will!"